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ABSTRACT

TO DETERMINE THE OPINIONS OF PARENTS CONCERNING THE RELATIVE MERITS OF MANUSCRIPT AND CURSIVE HANDWRITING, AN 11-QUESTION SURVEY WAS MADE OF 336 PARENTS IN A SUBURBAN CALIFORNIA COMMUNITY. RESULTS INDICATED THAT THE MAJORITY OF THE 328 RESPONDENTS PREFERRED THE USE OF MANUSCRIPT WRITING IN GRADES 1 AND 2 BUT OBJECTED TO ITS CONTINUED USE THROUGH GRADE 6; THEY THOUGHT CHILDREN WERE EAGER TO LEARN CURSIVE WRITING AND PREFERRED TO USE IT IN THE INTERMEDIATE GRADES. GENERALLY, ALTHOUGH MOST PARENTS FELT THAT THEY HAD RECEIVED ADEQUATE HANDWRITING INSTRUCTION, THEY BELIEVED THAT "HANDWRITING SKILLS" HAD BEEN NEGLECTED IN SCHOOLS IN RECENT YEARS. (JM)

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Parents' Opinions about Handwriting Styles

It has been believed that the continuation of manuscript handwriting through grade six would eliminate the problems that arise in the transfer to cursive handwriting in grades two or three (2, 3, 4, 5). The question, therefore, remains: Which handwriting style is more appropriate—cursive or manuscript?

Obviously, parents want the best handwriting curriculum a school system can offer. That parents today can be concerned about the use of handwriting being taught in the elementary schools is seen from studies such as the opinion survey conducted by the Stanford Institute of Journalistic Studies for the schools of Fresno, California (1). Here was gathered information concerning the attitudes of parents towards manuscript or cursive handwriting, and whether or not the schools should make any changes in this area of the curriculum. The purpose of this study was to learn how parents in one community regarded current practices of teaching cursive and manuscript writing in public elementary schools.

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The Present Study

The purpose of the present study was to determine the opinions of parents as to the relative merits of cursive and manuscript handwriting. The parents surveyed in the present study were those from a suburban community in Southern California. To learn the opinions of parents of children in one elementary school concerning the use of cursive and manuscript writing, a questionnaire consisting of eleven questions was prepared and distributed to 336 parents. Of these, 328, or 97.3 percent, responded. At the end of each questionnaire, space was provided for parents to make voluntary comments about any aspect of handwriting not included in the questionnaire.

These parents were asked to circle "yes" or "no" in answer to each given question (see Table I). Those questions left blank were judged to be "don't know." The total number of "yes" and "no" answers for each question was tabulated and used as the basis for determining these parents' opinions of cursive and manuscript writing in the elementary school. Responses of the parents of primary-grade children were differentiated from those of intermediate-grade children. Significant differences between proportions of these groups were determined.

Findings

The percentages of responses given by 328 parents to nine of the eleven questions in the questionnaire are shown in Table I. It appears that the parents of both primary- and intermediate-grade school children favored the use of manuscript writing in grades one and two, but would object to its continued use through grade six. Even

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Table I

Opinions of 328 Parents Towards the Use of Manuscript and Cursive Writing

Opinion	*Yes* %	*No* %	*Don't Know* %
Approve of manuscript in grades 1 and 2	89.0	10.4	.6
Object to manuscript through grade 6	81.1	18.0	.9
Manuscript enjoyed by children	50.6	43.9	5.5
Children wished to continue manuscript when changed to cursive	14.6	72.6	12.8
Children write manuscript as rapidly as cursive	19.8	75.3	4.9
Manuscript is easier to read than cursive	63.1	30.8	6.1
Handwriting more important today than 30 years ago	82.3	17.1	.6
Satisfied with own handwriting style	71.0	28.1	.9
Believe more handwriting skills needed	85.7	12.8	1.5

though 63.1 percent of the parents thought manuscript writing was easier to read than cursive, they objected to having their children use it for six years of grade school. Obvious concern about handwriting today as compared to that of thirty years ago was evidenced by parents of this school. That is, 82.3 percent responded "yes" to a question regarding its greater importance today than in the past. Table I also shows that 85.7 percent of the parents indicated that "more handwriting skills are needed" in all elementary school grades. In this case, their position seemed to indicate that the schools are lacking in this area. When asked about their own handwriting, 71 percent appeared to be fairly well satisfied with it at the time, however.

From the total of 328 parents who answered the question "Do you use manuscripwriting most of the time?" 88.1 percent responded "no," while 10.1 percent said they used it most of the time. Only 1.8 percent registered "don't know" to this question.

As seen in Table II, significantly larger percents of parents of primary children thought manuscript handwriting was enjoyed by children, and that this style could be written as fast as cursive. The table also indicates that a significantly larger percent of parents of intermediate pupils believed children did not want to continue manuscript. This issue is clouded by the fact so many parents of primary pupils did not respond, as is shown. As seen, 35.4 percent of the parents of primary children did not know whether or not their children wanted to continue to write in manuscript-style form.

From the total of 328 parents who answered the question "Do you know when the change is made to cursive writing?" 69.5 percent thought the change was made in the third grade, which was true for this school. Only 6.1 percent thought cursive writing was started in the second grade, while 22.3 percent registered "don't know" to this question. Only 2.1 percent thought cursive writing was started in the fourth grade. From these responses it can be assumed that these parents did have knowledge about this aspect of the handwriting curriculum of the school.

The voluntary comments made by parents were similar in that they thought

Table II

Comparison of Primary and Intermediate Grade Children's Parents' Opinions about Cursive and Manuscript Writing

Opinion	*Yes*			*No*			*Don't Know*		
	*P** %	*I** %	*Dif.*	*P* %	*I* %	*Dif.*	*P* %	*I* %	*Dif.*
Approve of manuscript in grades 1 and 2	92.9	87.3	5.6	7.1	11.8	4.7	–	.9	.9
Object to manuscript through grade 6	80.8	81.2	.4	18.2	17.9	.3	1.0	.9	.1
Manuscript enjoyed by children	64.6	44.5	20.1**	26.3	51.6	25.3**	9.1	3.9	5.2
Children wished to continue manuscript when changed to cursive	11.1	16.1	5.0	53.5	80.8	27.3**	35.4	3.1	32.3**
Children write manuscript as rapidly as cursive	33.3	15.3	18.0**	60.6	81.6	21.0**	9.1	3.1	6.0
Manuscript is easier to read than cursive	70.7	59.8	10.9	23.2	34.1	10.9	6.1	6.1	–
Handwriting more important today than 30 years ago	79.8	83.4	3.6	19.2	16.1	3.1	1.0	.5	.5
Satisfied with own handwriting style	77.8	68.1	9.7	22.2	30.6	8.4	–	1.3	1.3
Think more handwriting skills needed	85.9	85.6	.3	10.1	13.9	3.8	4.0	.5	3.5

P = 99 parents of primary children.

I = 299 parents of intermediate children.

**Difference significant at .01 percent level of confidence.

there should be increased emphasis in handwriting skills, and that a definite time each day for instructing children in handwriting improvement should be kept. Some of these general comments were:

> I would like to see more emphasis put on developing a better handwriting skill while youngsters are still in the elementary grades.
>
> I feel more time should be devoted to penmanship and developing a good handwriting style.
>
> The average child's ability to write clearly should be developed to the fullest extent of his capabilities. This is *not* being done.
>
> I feel handwriting should be legible (mine may not be!), but beyond that it should be simply a means of putting what one wants to say on paper as fast as possible. I cannot see putting undue emphasis on the subject.
>
> Good handwriting is fast becoming a lost art.
>
> I have felt for some time that more emphasis should be put on legible cursive writing.
>
> More work should be done to teach children to write legibly. Perhaps a return to the old penmanship drills is in order.

Conclusions

The high percentage of responses from parents to this study indicated their concern with handwriting of their children in the elementary school. Generally, parents of primary-and intermediate-grade children wanted more emphasis to be given to handwriting skills to help develop their children's handwriting style. Although the majority of parents indicated they had experienced fairly good instruction in handwriting skills in their early life, apparently this experience had not extended to their children's instruction at the time of the survey since these parents believed that "handwriting skills" had been neglected during the past few years.

Parents accepted manuscript writing in grades one and two, but showed they would object if it were carried on through the sixth grade. Parental knowledge concerning the handwriting curriculum was evidenced by the awareness of the majority of these parents that their children had changed to cursive writing in the elementary grades. Parents further indicated that their children were anxious to learn cursive writing and preferred it to manuscript as they progressed through the intermediate grades. About half the parents said their children enjoyed manuscript writing. Could it be said children would not object if they continued using it in all the grades?

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